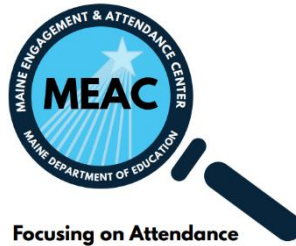


Maine Engagement and Attendance Center (MEAC) Office Hour #1 Follow-up Notes



Session #1– Creating emotionally and physically safe environments

September 18, 2025, 3:30-4:30

Recording: To see the MEAC Office Hour Recording, please visit the MEAC webpage:

<https://www.maine.gov/doe/meac>

Summary of Session:

Sarah Nelson welcomed participants to the first Maine Engagement and Attendance Center office hour, focusing on Tier 1 evidence-based strategies to support increased attendance. She introduced the agenda, which included introductions, a presentation on creating emotionally and physically safe environments, breakout discussions, and sharing actionable practices. Aubrie Howard, a Student Success and Wellbeing Specialist, was introduced as the content expert for the session. The meeting aimed to provide practical insights, research, and implementation steps for improving attendance in Maine schools, with resources to be shared via email after the session.

Building Belonging in School Climate

Aubrie discussed the importance of creating a positive school climate that fosters a sense of belonging among students, staff, families, and community partners. She introduced the concept of the "nine moments of belonging," developed by Susie Wise and the Othering and Belonging Institute of UC Berkeley, which includes invitation, entering, participation, contributing, flowing, code switching, dissent, repair, and diverging/exiting. Aubrie emphasized that building a positive school climate requires continuous effort and attention to various touchpoints, including academic, social, and emotional domains, to ensure students feel safe, valued, and respected.

Tier 1 Supports Implementation Strategies

Aubrie presented resources and strategies for implementing Tier 1 supports in schools, focusing on creating inclusive environments through classroom greetings, multilingual translation

services, and student voice initiatives. She emphasized the importance of co-regulation spaces in classrooms and schools, noting that these practices can be effective across all grade levels. Sarah highlighted the concept of regulation stations that allow students to choose tools based on their individual needs, whether for calming or energizing. The discussion included resources for school and community partnerships, including Maine Regional Care Team, Maine Youth Thriving (MyT), and various youth support programs.

Restorative Practices and School Climate

Aubrie discussed restorative practices and school climate, emphasizing the importance of creating safe spaces for conversations and building community. She highlighted Stacey Barlow's work in implementing these practices across the state and shared Susie Wise's quote about feeling safe, seen, and valued in schools. Due to technical difficulties with multiple participants being unable to actively engage from on-the-road, Sarah suggested moving on to sharing resources and tools for implementing positive practices, such as greeting students by name and conducting school climate surveys. The next meeting was scheduled for October 16th.

PBIS Implementation and Resources Update

Sarah discussed the importance of whole-system implementation of PBIS practices and highlighted various resources available to support schools, including the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) data for grades 5-12, expected to be released by late winter. She announced the upcoming PBIS Annual Conference in November and encouraged attendance at future MEAC office hours. Sarah also promoted the Count Me In newsletter and coaching services led by Jess Anderson, emphasizing the local expertise available to support schools in addressing chronic absenteeism and implementing effective practices.

Wrap-up and reminder to join the next MEAC Office Hour, Oct. 16th, 3:30 – 4:30, to explore building routine, relationships, and relevance

Month	Strategy	Student Attendance Actions	Family Attendance Actions	Educator Attendance Actions	Administrator Attendance Actions
September	Create emotionally and physically safe environments	Participate in community-building activities	Share safety concerns; attend family events	Greet students daily; establish classroom norms	Identify safety and belonging concerns; monitor safety protocols; welcome students

This month, our TIER 1 Evidence-based practice focus:

SEPTEMBER – *Help Students Feel Safe and Seen*

Check: Do students feel emotionally and physically safe?

Research: Payne, 2018; DePaoli & McCombs, 2023 ([Payne, 2018](#); [DePaoli, & McCombs, 2023](#))

- ❖ Welcoming environments: Clean, inclusive, culturally responsive spaces.
- ❖ Strong relationships with staff: One trusted adult improves engagement.
- ❖ Restorative and trauma-informed approaches: Replace punitive practices with connection-based discipline.

Slide deck from MEAC Office Hours #1, Sept. 2025:

https://stateofmaine-my.sharepoint.com/personal/sarah_nelson_maine_gov/Documents/Desktop/Maine%20Engagement%20and%20Attendance%20Center.%20Office%20Hours.%201.0.pdf

- **Practices to consider implementing in the next month:**

- **Greet students daily at the door, by name, in an engaged and unbusy manner:**
 - Develop your own ‘Greeting at the Door’ Routine and visual [Brain-based Benefits of Greeting Students at the Door](#)
- Download and conduct a **school climate survey**:
 - PBIS School Climate Survey: [PBISApps | School Climate Surveys \(SCS\)](#)
- **Sign up for the CMI (Count ME In!) Newsletter** <http://eepurl.com/h6FSZT> (CMI e-news)
 - <https://countmeinmaine.org/about-count-me-in/>
- View Maine Youth Thriving’s four 90 second Public Service Announcements
 - MyT’s brand new [Public Service Announcement - See Me. Hear Me. Value Me.](#) This project amplifies student voices and shares with caring adults and peers what *Maine students say they need* in order to experience wellbeing.

- For more information, visit [Maine Youth Thriving - Home](#)
 - Maine Youth Thriving (formerly Maine Resilience Building Network) Summit registration: <https://maineyouththriving.org/event/myt-2025-summit-revive/>
- Download **Relationship Mapping** resources:
 - [Relationship Mapping — Making Caring Common](#)
- Explore **MIYHS data**:
 - School principals and superintendents have password-protected access to MIYHS data for their schools and districts. Administrators who have not established access to their data should contact Hayley Pawlowski, the MIYHS Coordinator @ miyhs.dhhs@maine.gov
- **Review** School Administrative Unit **discipline data** for overuse of exclusionary practices
- Use **inclusive visuals and materials**
- **Register to attend the PBIS Annual Conference:** [Conference — Maine PBIS](#),
 - Nov. 13th, Augusta Civic Center 8:30-4:00
 - **If you have been identified for additional school support, you receive 3 free school-level registrations to the Maine PBIS conference**
- **Connect with Aubrie Howard for school climate supports**
 - Aubrie.Howard@maine.gov
- **Connect with Signe Lynch for student / McKinney-Vento supports**
 - Signe.Lynch@maine.gov
- **Connect with Stacy Barlow to explore Creating a Culture of Care in Schools using Restorative Practices:** [Creating a Culture of Care: Training Sequence](#)
 - Stacey.Barlow@maine.gov

Attend future MEAC Office Hours the 3rd Thursday of each month, 3:30-4:30 [Register HERE for MEAC Office Hours](#)

Students thrive when they feel emotionally and physically safe.

Shared practices of what is already working well to make this happen...

Feedback from the Ed Summit, Thomas College, August 2025

Student Attendance Actions:

- Co-creating student success plans
- Students choose their own goals
- Forming connections with school adults
- Participating in community-building activities
- Advocating as student ambassadors
- Using student voice to be included in policy committees, student government, school improvement, and student-led conferences

Family Attendance Actions:

- Offering a sounding board for students
- Sharing safety concerns with the school
- Attending family events
- Reaching out to someone at school to share what's happening with their child
- Taking their child to the doctor or specialist
- Supporting school-based health centers

Educator Attendance Actions:

- Greeting students by name each day
- Prioritizing SEL focus in all classrooms
- Advocating for guidance programs
- Consistent and intentional PBIS schoolwide
- Creating a student support center
- Greeting kids at the door
- Reframing cafeteria experiences- making available low-stress seating, time to eat, on-duty staff connecting with kids, calm environment, eating without worrying about missing out
- Breaking down barriers for ELL families (texting in first language)
- Student greetings at the door of school and classroom, everyone, every day
- Establishing advisory/morning meetings
- Building relationships with students
- 24/7 availability for student community
- Greeting students, calling them by name daily
- Implementing meditation, journaling
- Engaging in the BARR program
- Establishing classroom norms
- Talking/ holding restorative circles
- Having a person to connect with-buddy teacher, school counselor, student council,
- Staff choosing students silently to mentor

Administrator Attendance Actions:

- Walking in students' shoes/I wish my teacher knew...
- Incorporating a morning meeting school-wide for all students
- Opening doors and greeting students
- Creating a closet of food and warm clothing supplies
- Establishing a place to rest if needed
- Connecting with students
- Prioritizing a systemic focus on safety and belonging
- Identifying safety and belonging concerns
- Monitoring safety protocols
- Welcoming students
- Following up on bus issues
- Greeting students each day when they arrive
- Developing morning connection/welcoming/connections routines
- Checking in with a trusted person
- Supporting social work services
- Hosting a breakfast "bunch"
- Admin opening doors and greeting students
- Smiling
- Engaging in PBIS practices
- Greeting students daily
- Working with staff on building culture and climate
- Being playful
- Admin and social workers greeting students outside at arrival
- Promoting safety -no "detention" no punitive-based responses when students aren't following the rules
- No one eats alone

Community Attendance Partner Actions:

- Building a positive school culture with community support
- Supporting School Resource Officers as proactive problem solvers
- Supporting inclusive events that build school belonging
- Advocating for Licensed Clinical Social Workers
- Budgeting for school counselors and clinicians available for all students